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DECONSTRUCTING, RECLAIMING, AND TRANSFORMING THE DISCOURSE
OF FETAL PERSONHOOD: A PRO-CHOICE FEMINIST IMPERATIVE

A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FUFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

BY

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DENTON, TEXAS

DECEMBER 2005

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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Lea C. Ivy entitled "Deconstructing, Reclaiming, and Transforming the Discourse of Fetal Personhood: A Pro-Choice Feminist Imperative." I have examined this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in Women's Studies.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Claire L. Sahlin". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Claire L. Sahlin, Major Professor

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is the culmination of lived experience, much self-reflection, and unprecedented academic guidance in the field of Women's Studies. I owe a debt of gratitude to the following individuals:

To Claire L. Sahlin, PhD, Associate Professor, Chair of my graduate committee, and Director of the Women's Studies Program, for your high expectations, wise mentoring, constant encouragement, and kindness.

To AnaLouise Keating, PhD, Associate Professor and member of my graduate committee, for raising my awareness on so many levels, for stretching my mind far beyond what I thought were its limits, and for your enduring optimism.

To Erin Rider, Nery Morales, Dana Curtis, and Catherine Tower, friends and fellow Women's Studies classmates, for your friendship and for tolerating all of my anxieties with humor.

To Karen Ivy, my mother, for your unconditional love and resilience, and our survival. To the many brave women who received abortions in my care, for the privilege of bearing witness to your lives.

ABSTRACT

LEA C. IVY

DECONSTRUCTING, RECLAIMING, AND TRANSFORMING THE DISCOURSE OF FETAL PERSONHOOD: A PRO-CHOICE FEMINIST IMPERATIVE

DECEMBER 2005

The abortion debate in contemporary U.S. society involves binary arguments that pit pregnant women and fetuses against one another. Fetal rights advocates maintain that the fetus is a person with full moral rights and utilize the discourse of fetal personhood to articulate their pro-life agenda. Women's rights advocates assert that women are morally autonomous persons who possess the right to exercise independent agency regarding their reproductive capacities. They argue for a pro-choice perspective that hinges on the abstract rhetoric of rights. By examining literature from pro-life and pro-choice groups, drawing from various scholars, and reflecting on my work as a nurse in an abortion clinic, I deconstruct both discourses and demonstrate how they serve to disempower women and to reinforce institutional oppressions. I offer strategies for mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations to reclaim the discourse of fetal personhood and work toward developing an inclusive discourse that empowers all women.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When the chromosomes of the father and mother unite, they form an absolutely unique, never-to-be-duplicated human person. At that moment, life begins. From that moment on, any further formation of the person is purely a matter of development, growth and maturation. From the moment of conception, the child grows. (Love)

Women deserve the right to be treated as moral decision-makers and to choose the course of their reproductive lives. To lose that right . . . would be to slip back to the bleak and desperate days when women were de facto second-class citizens, expected to bear children regardless of our physical or emotional health. (Pearl and Planned Parenthood Federation of America, June 2005, 3-4)

Within contemporary U.S. society vitriolic debates on reproductive issues center primarily on abortion or more specifically on a woman's right to choose an abortion versus the fetus's right to life. Much of the current discourse hinges on the recognition or dismissal of the concept of "fetal personhood." In the context of contemporary debates about abortion, "personhood" refers to the status of embodied subjectivity through which individuals gain recognition as members or "persons" of a collective group and become entitled to enjoy all social, moral, and legal rights due persons as defined and enforced by the state. Fetal personhood refers to the idea or belief that fetuses constitute embodied subjects recognized as persons due all applicable rights with the most salient being the right to life. Current debates about abortion reinforce a seemingly unyielding dichotomy between women and fetuses, a dichotomy that has ultimately restricted public discourse

to a struggle over whose rights should take precedence. This struggle wages in the legal and sociopolitical arenas as individuals, restricted by the dichotomous discourse of rights, are compelled to align themselves with women or with fetuses.

There exists little acknowledgement from mainstream¹ pro-choice feminist organizations (e.g., [P]lanned [P]arenthood [F]ederation of [A]merica and [N]ational [A]bortion [R]ights [A]ction [L]eague Pro-Choice America) and certainly none from fetal rights advocates of an interdependent relationship between pregnant women and their fetuses. This interdependent relationship is best described by feminist ethicist Susan Sherwin who states, “Fetuses develop in specific pregnancies that occur in the lives of particular women. . . . Their very existence is relationally defined, reflecting their development within particular women’s bodies; that relationship gives those women reason to be concerned about them” (108-9). Concern for their fetuses is no less deliberate or genuine for the women who choose to terminate their pregnancies than for those who decide to carry their pregnancies to term. Women’s deliberate consideration of the multiple meanings a fetus brings to their particular lives and the fetus’s reliance on a pregnant woman to make meaning of its existence, that is to determine whether or not it will be born and under what circumstances, illustrates an interdependent relationship.

Both fetal and women’s rights advocates appear hesitant and/or wholly opposed to acknowledging this dynamic, relational status of women and fetuses because such an act could be construed as ceding ground to the opposing viewpoint. With a current political administration hostile to women’s reproductive rights and poised to enact further restrictive measures (e.g., “fetal pain” bills, criminal penalties for escorting minors across

state borders for abortions, and anti-choice judicial nominations) one understands how both mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations and fetal rights advocates feel the need to defend strongly their respective stances. In defending their positions, the use of language constitutes a powerful strategy with which to frame public discourse and ultimately sway public opinion.

The dichotomous rhetoric of maternal/fetal rights is ubiquitous and serves to galvanize public opinion through the use of highly emotive, inflammatory metaphors and images that appeal to individuals' core values. In general, mainstream pro-choice feminists espouse rhetoric that focuses strongly on the rights of women as the ultimate decision makers with regard to their bodies. Their argument focuses on women's moral autonomy and presupposes that fetuses are "non-subjects" or secondary/subordinate subjects at best. For example, the PPFA-affiliated website <http://www.saveROE.com> reflects the following comment on abortion: "The ability to control our fertility is a fundamental human right, and decisions about childbearing should be made by a woman, in consultation with her family, her doctor, and her conscience, not by the government or politicians." Moreover, a 2005 solicitation letter from NARAL Pro-Choice America chastises President George W. Bush for his attempts to "give embryos even more legal rights at the expense of women." These statements imply that the status of fetuses is either subordinate to that of women or simply a "non-issue."

In contrast, fetal rights advocates espouse rhetoric that recognizes fetuses as independent, uniquely vulnerable persons whose interests or rights are equal to and even supersede those of women. Thus, through their assertion that fetuses are persons, these

advocates demand state intervention to ensure that this uniquely vulnerable population enjoys protection from harm. The sole focus of fetal rights advocates on fetuses effectively relegates women to the status of secondary or subordinate subjects. For example, My Secret Life/My Secret Death, a pamphlet published by the American Life League, Inc., states, “Each human being—from the moment of fertilization—is a unique, human person with a right to live. The circumstances surrounding that little one’s entry into the world are irrelevant.” In addition, the website of Life Dynamics, Inc., a self-proclaimed “anti-abortion pro-life organization,” boasts the following motto: “Pro-Life: without compromise, without exception, without apology.” The sentiment expressed in these statements is that the fetus is the primary and perhaps, the *only* subject worthy of consideration. These statements imply that pregnant women’s circumstances simply do not matter and that ideological compromise is not an option.

Individuals on both sides of the current pro-choice/pro-life debate use language to convey very different messages about personhood and rights. Fetal rights advocates have used language much more effectively to suit their purposes than mainstream pro-choice feminists. Fetal rights advocates notoriously refer to fetuses as “unborn children.” By deliberately using language that denotes embodied subjectivity, they confer the status of personhood upon fetuses and implore society to protect these vulnerable subjects. Moreover, the media’s complacent use of the term “unborn children” in reference to fetuses and recent, sensationalized reporting of the murders of pregnant women bolster the position of fetal rights advocates by continually distorting public perceptions of fetuses. This distortion primarily involves portraying fetuses as if they were born babies

who are independent human beings entirely separate from the women carrying them. On the other hand, mainstream pro-choice feminists have neglected to address adequately the discourse of fetal personhood in their adherence to “rights” discourse. Through their self-imposed silence, they have allowed fetal rights advocates to frame and dominate the terms of the discussion. I believe that mainstream pro-choice feminists must acknowledge the profundity of fetal personhood discourse and embrace the challenge of transforming it. They must reclaim and reframe the discourse to deconstruct and expose the right-wing, patriarchal ideology behind it, an ideology that seeks ultimately to dictate women’s roles and to limit their subjective agency.

In this thesis I will demonstrate that the mainstream pro-choice feminist movement has failed to engage meaningfully with the discourse of fetal personhood and argue that its contemporary “rights-based” argument couched in terms of “choice” reinforces the discourse of fetal personhood and marginalizes certain groups of women while simultaneously hindering all women’s agency. In Chapter Two I will explore a few examples of the visual, technological, and linguistic strategies utilized by fetal rights advocates to place the image of the personified fetus front and center in the public eye and to shift the sociocultural discourse toward one of eternal conflict between women and fetuses. I will examine specifically pro-life pamphlets and brochures distributed by Life Dynamics, Inc., American Life League, Inc., and The White Rose Women’s Center, a pro-life crisis pregnancy center in Dallas, Texas.

In Chapter Three I will examine mainstream pro-choice feminist responses or lack of responses to the discourse of fetal personhood as well as discuss problematic aspects

of the movement's adherence to the rhetoric of control and choice that limit many women's agency. In Chapter Four I will deconstruct the rhetoric of control and choice to expose how such discourses espoused in the websites and promotional literature (e.g., solicitation letters) of mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations, such as PPFA and NARAL, border on and sometimes actively collude with institutional oppressions, including racism, classism, capitalism, and eugenics. For example, I will illustrate how PPFA's unchecked valorization of its founder, Margaret Sanger, and failure to critique her ties to the eugenics movement help to perpetuate the ideology of controlling the populations of "undesirables" (i.e., the poor, the disabled, and people of color) that continues to shape social welfare policies. I will also explore how PPFA's and NARAL's narrow focus on women's rights to prevent pregnancy and to choose abortion reflects complicity with a capitalist ideology that values and rewards workforce participation above all, thus, rendering the concept of "choice" irrelevant for many women. I will further utilize such examples to demonstrate how mainstream pro-choice feminists' rhetorical practices marginalize and/or erase women's subjective agency in much the same way as the discourse of fetal personhood employed by fetal rights advocates in that both perpetuate the maternal/fetal dichotomy and remain complicit with systems of oppression. Through their refusal to address publicly the value of fetuses, mainstream pro-choice feminists succeed only in reinforcing the idea that there exists an inevitable, adversarial relationship between women and fetuses—a key point made by fetal rights advocates who claim that women's agency results in fetal harm and, therefore, must be curtailed. Furthermore, through their refusal to engage in an open discussion of their

complicity with the state's social control, they hinder women's agency by allowing fetal rights advocates' spurious analogizing of abortion with social atrocities like the Holocaust and slavery to go virtually uncontested in the public discursive arena.

In Chapters Five and Six I will posit an alternative mode of discourse for the mainstream pro-choice feminist movement that displaces the maternal/fetal conflictive dyad and hence, the discourse of fetal personhood, and transforms the dialogue by reclaiming and enhancing women's subjective agency. I will focus specifically on developing a language that reflects a plurality of pro-choice voices in continual dialogue and recognizes the relational status of pregnancy. Pro-choice feminists can use this alternative discourse to build coalitions with other entities committed to social justice issues. Most importantly, they can use it to counter the uncompromising position of fetal rights advocates—that fetal interests are all that matters—in public discussions on abortion.

While some feminist theorists and activists do question and criticize the ulterior motives behind mainstream pro-choice discourse, their voices remain largely absent in the current rhetoric of mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations like PPFA and NARAL Pro-Choice America. The concerns of women who staff abortion clinics are rarely articulated to the public, perhaps for fear that they might detract from the movement's unified image. As a clinician who has worked in an abortion clinic for the past three years, I have had the privilege of assisting women of all ethnicities, religions, ages, abilities, and socioeconomic statuses. Through listening to their stories, I have come to realize that the realities of women's lives do not fit neatly into the rigid pro-life and

pro-choice ideologies. I have come to question what it means to be “pro-choice” and have found the current movement’s answers inadequate and ultimately disempowering to many women. As a supporter of both PPFA and NARAL, I will offer a pro-choice perspective that not only deconstructs the discourse of fetal personhood, but also criticizes contemporary pro-choice rhetoric from the position of one who works directly with women seeking to terminate their pregnancies.

I aim to establish a paradigm of reproductive empowerment that mainstream, pro-choice feminists can employ to reclaim and reframe the discourse of fetal personhood propagated by fetal rights advocates. This paradigm will attempt to displace the ideology of western liberalism that pervades the contemporary discourse of the mainstream movement with a framework that embraces an ongoing pluralistic dialogue and resists capitulating to dichotomous, inflammatory modes of discourse. By exploring and extending the arguments of various scholars and activists, I intend to demonstrate how such a paradigm founded on pluralistic dialogue will enhance women’s reproductive agency and counter more effectively attacks by fetal rights advocates through the acknowledgement of maternal/fetal relationality. I hope to convince mainstream, pro-choice feminist organizations, such as PPFA and NARAL Pro-Choice America, of the importance of reclaiming and reframing the discourse of fetal personhood while simultaneously interrogating their own discursive practices. The adoption of a paradigm and language committed to recognizing maternal/fetal relationality and the articulation of a more nuanced public discussion of women’s agency constitute foundational elements of reproductive empowerment advocacy and justice for all people.

CHAPTER II

THE FETUS TAKES CENTER STAGE: PRO-LIFE RHETORIC AND FETAL REPRESENTATION

Nothing is more central to the arguments of fetal rights advocates² than the use of emotive fetal imagery designed to delight and repulse simultaneously. So-called pro-life propaganda often juxtaposes romanticized images of fetuses nestled within wombs and horrifying images of dismembered late-term fetuses heaped together in a pile resembling “human garbage”³ to bolster their inflammatory rhetoric that equates abortion with the murder of vulnerable, innocent children. For example, a pamphlet published by American Life League, Inc., reflects two titles, My Secret Life and My Secret Death, on the front and back covers. The reader determines the front and back cover by virtue of which way s/he chooses to view the pamphlet. The image accompanying the My Secret Life title reflects a very early-term fetus swaddled in a placental cocoon that would be hidden from our view were it not for ultrasound technology. The image accompanying the My Secret Death title is that of a very late- or possibly even full-term fetus who appears battered and bruised. Whereas the former image is recessed and reflects the entire fetal form, the latter image is markedly close-up and reflects only the face and hands of the fetus with the hands appearing to shield the face. In fact, the hands reflect the aforementioned bruising, and such a provocative image supports the rhetorical assertions contained within the pamphlet that the fetus, however defenseless, is an autonomous agent who actively

attempts to defend himself⁴ from abuse like a born person and who deserves, by virtue of his uniquely fragile status, protection from any and all attempts at harm. By embracing western culture's reliance on seeing as knowing, the pro-life contingency exploits technology (e.g., ultrasound and fetal photography) to bolster its assertion of fetal personhood and evokes empathy for fetuses by portraying them as "just like" born persons.

As Laurie Shrage notes, the pro-life conflation of fetuses and born persons through the savvy use of technologic imagery stirs up public emotion and moral unrest regarding abortion. In "From Reproductive Rights to Reproductive Barbie: Post-*Porn* Modernism and Abortion," Shrage states, "Activists create dramatic images of life and death before birth . . . images that then recirculate in newspaper stories about failed 'rescue missions' when the protesters are arrested. Readers of the stories might wonder why these people were arrested for trying to rescue babies like the ones in their posters" (81). Shrage's comment conveys a key use of language by the pro-life establishment that resonates with the masses—the interchangeable use of the terms "fetus," "baby," and "infant." The pro-life establishment capitalizes on the masses' indifference to scientific nomenclature that generally refrains from emotionally or culturally-charged words. However precisely they may describe the actual, processual phenomenon, terms like "embryo" and "fetus" seem stilted in ordinary discourse. Barbara Duden echoes this sentiment when she ruminates on the historical definition(s) and uses of the term "fetus." She states, "[U]sing the term *fetus* made you into a social worker or a nurse. Ordinarily, a woman was pregnant with child, would beget a child, or go with child . . ." (53). While

such quaint references as “with child” appear lacking in contemporary discourse on pregnancy, the apathetic public has nevertheless tolerated the pro-life establishment’s introduction of the term “unborn child(ren)” into the discursive field with little to no acknowledgement and analysis of its problematic implications (e.g., the politics of how one becomes a mother and/or who can mother, increased monitoring of pregnant women in the interest of fetal protection, and shifting governmental funding from low-income “born” children to unborn children⁵).

For example, a pamphlet entitled It’s Your Turn, written by Karen Black and distributed by the White Rose Women’s Center, a pro-life organization fronting as a crisis pregnancy center in Dallas, Texas, states, “You will not ‘become a mother.’ You are a mother right now. Let us help you protect yourself and your child.” According to this statement, a woman is not pregnant with a fetus; she is a mother with a child. Such romanticized rhetoric fails to elicit meaningful inquiry regarding the conflation of pregnancy and motherhood from an apathetic public. However, Black ironically exposes one of the aforementioned problematic implications a few statements later with the following assertion: “There are many people waiting to help you through your entire pregnancy.” This statement lacks the message of romanticized motherhood and instead offers help through pregnancy, an obviously time-limited condition. The implicit message is that “mothers” of “unborn children” are deserving of help while pregnant but not necessarily once they become mothers of “born children.” Inherent in the statements throughout It’s Your Turn is the pro-life ideological argument that the fetus is a child and, therefore, a person.

Furthermore, the ubiquitous use of the term “unborn child(ren)” in various U.S. media outlets further supports the idea of fetal personhood. Some examples include: “a fetal heart device that monitors *babies before birth*” (“Harvard”); “Police said they have interviewed Jayden’s father . . . and the father of her *unborn daughter* . . .” (“FW Mother”); and “[O]lder moms are likely to be offered tests that can tell them if their *unborn children* have the disorder” (“Top 10”) (italic emphases mine). The cavalier use of the term “baby” when referencing one’s own pregnancy and/or those of friends and acquaintances in casual conversations as well as the use of pronouns such as “him” and “her” in reference to a developing fetus also contribute to the reification of fetal personhood.

The pro-life contingency shrewdly understands that most people simply do not relate to such scientific terms as “embryo” and “fetus,” at least not at the level required to bolster widespread support for the implementation of pro-life sociopolitical initiatives. The pro-life establishment realizes that a significant number of people do relate to and identify easily with terms such as “infant” and “baby” because they can and do physically and voyeuristically (via technology and the media) encounter such beings and are thus capable of conjuring up all sorts of emotional associations at mere mention of the terms. Although they recognize the masses’ generalized distaste for scientific discourse, the pro-life establishment does not fail to recognize western culture’s often unchecked reverence for medical science and its “fact-based” discoveries. Accordingly, the pro-life contingency embraces and manipulates scientific, technological innovations, most

notably, ultrasound, to further its fetal personhood ideology while resting assured that an acquiescent public will readily absorb its messages in the name of “objective” science.

Ultrasound technology or sonography lends itself especially well to the support of the pro-life discourse of fetal personhood precisely because the images it generates are imprecise. Sonographic images are unfamiliar and usually unrecognizable to the untrained eye. Herein lies an opportunity for the pro-life establishment to make its point. The images require interpretation—a task pro-lifers have gleefully taken on under the guise of science with the spurious goal of educating the masses about biological conception and human life. Various scholars note the importance of the quality of arbitrariness with regard to sonography to the pro-life agenda. Deirdre Moira Condit asserts that “the vagueness of sonographic imagery” (29) enables pro-lifers to attribute rhetorically human characteristics to the developing fetus, a process she refers to as “anthropomorphizing the fetus” (25). Ingrid Zechmeister observes that ultrasound as it has been used to visualize the fetal patient “bestows upon the foetus the image of a ‘tiny little person’ . . . who can be observed in real time mode when it kicks, excretes and yawns. This ‘human behavior’ reinforces its image of a person” (393). Joanne Boucher warns, “[I]t must be emphasized that it is the verbal arguments of the narrator which explain the meaning of the photographs to the viewer. The photographs do not ‘speak’ self-evident truths” (11). Boucher’s statement encapsulates best the question of sonography’s value as “objective” science—a conjecture tacitly assumed and propagated by the pro-life establishment.

Though enthusiastically interested in the science of sonography as it can be used to serve their ideological goals, the pro-life contingency's faith in science stops with any suggestion of the developmental aspects of the fetus or human life. At all times, the pro-life establishment strives to situate rhetorically the fetus as a pro-active "person" from the moment of conception whose "body" is completely separate from the woman carrying it. In the rare instance that developmental aspects are addressed, they are quickly glossed over so that the fetus is made to appear just like a born baby in a mere matter of days. The American Life League's My Secret Life/My Secret Death pamphlet provides a timeline of fetal development informing the reader that by "Day 20—His [sic] heart, brain, spinal column, and nervous system are almost complete and his eyes begin to form." In this statement, the writer appeals to our faith in science to the degree that we all understand the necessary organ systems required to sustain human life. Interestingly, s/he neglects to address the lack of lung development without which no human life can presently exist. Since the rhetoric is juxtaposed with a greatly enhanced sonographic image of an approximately six to seven-week old fetus, we are led to believe that a three-week old fetus, if not exactly like a born baby, is definitely on the fast track to "baby" status. We *see* that there really exists no in-between time from fetus to born baby; they are virtually one and the same. The long time period between conception and birth (approximately 38 weeks from conception in a typical, uncomplicated pregnancy) suggests ample reasons to believe that fetuses and babies are indeed different. This fact remains conveniently ignored and unchallenged by pro-lifers and the apathetic public

alike. Fetuses are in the process of becoming persons both biologically and socially; babies, by virtue of having completed this process, are persons.

The process of likening a fetus to a born baby requires that the fetus be featured as mimicking the behavior of a born baby as much as possible because babies' behavior often evokes intense emotional reactions from individuals witnessing it. In order to buttress their claims that the fetus deserves legal protection, the pro-life establishment strives to portray the fetus as an independent, pro-active person who self-directs its own gestation. For instance, the writer of My Secret Life/My Secret Death rapturously exclaims, "His [sic] body (even consisting of just one cell!) has instructed his mother's body to stop producing certain hormones, to start producing other hormones, and to ready his mother's womb for the next nine months. That's a pretty self-sufficient little person!" Here we see the profound "leap of faith required to equate a single cell and a fully formed human being" (Boucher 11) on which the pro-lifer relies heavily even as s/he appears to present scientific facts (i.e., the host of complex metabolic processes seemingly caused directly by the fetus) in support of her or his cause. Throughout the pamphlet, we continually encounter such humanizing and sexist references to the fetus as "our small friend's face" and "this little boy." We are told that by the fourth month of pregnancy "his mom can now feel him jumping around and turning somersaults, exercising the muscles and lungs he will need to live outside his mother's womb." Through this pro-life rhetorician's use of anthropomorphizing language, we are led to believe that this fetus is indeed an unborn child or actually an unborn, male child who is an aspiring gymnast with a small, friendly face! How could we not want to protect such a prodigy?

Illustrating the fetus's supposedly self-directed behavior while remaining silent on the pregnant woman's agency (at least in the beginning) sets the stage for the pro-life establishment to assert the "truth" of fetal personhood and demand civil protections afforded to persons in U.S. society. Given that fetuses are located within and dependent upon pregnant women, rights-bearers themselves, the pro-life establishment has worked hard to place the fetus front and center, thus causing the pregnant woman to simply fade into the shadows as a matter of "natural consequence." The pro-life contingency mounts a vociferous, often belligerent campaign against pregnant women in the form of anti-abortion and maternal control activism but has strategically waged a more compelling, non-confrontational argument that focuses on visually and rhetorically separating fetuses and women. This tactic serves to refute the accusation that the pro-life establishment cares little about the rights of women even though their actions and agenda point to the contrary.

Various scholars note how the pro-life establishment's stealthy presentation of the fetus helps persuade the masses of the "truth" of fetal personhood and the so-called need for fetal protection laws. Cynthia R. Daniels states, "As the fetus emerged as a person, the pregnant woman began literally to disappear from view. . . . In much of the promotional literature of the anti-abortion movement, the fetus is visually separated from the mother, presented as an autonomous free-floating being, attached tenuously to the 'mother ship' by the umbilical cord" (21). Likewise, P. Lealle Ruhl states, "[W]here the fetus—thanks largely to ultrasounds now performed in grotesquely unnecessary numbers—is literally *seen* as an embattled individual, it should not be surprising to see

the law called upon to protect this helpless person-to-be” (40). Turning again to the American Life League’s My Secret Life/My Secret Death, we find that all of this brochure’s sonographic, photographic, and hand-drawn fetal images reflect the fetus as an isolated subjected either wholly apart from or swaddled deeply within a freely existent placenta, an entity that does not actually exist. In one picture we view the fetus illuminated against a black backdrop, and we can barely make out the umbilical cord. There is no placenta and hence, no pregnant woman to be seen. There is a picture of a woman holding a toddler child next to her story recounting her “harrowing” experience of how she almost aborted him but thankfully did not. However, nowhere in this pamphlet is a picture of a pregnant woman. Likewise, the pro-life brochures Crisis Pregnancy? and Did You Know [sic] lack pictures of pregnant women, but the Did You Know brochure does feature a close-up of a woman’s face alongside that of what appears to be a newborn baby with a caption stating, “This baby was born when the mother was only 4 ½ months pregnant and is a normal healthy child today.” This statement is false; an 18 week-old fetus has never been born alive.⁶ Yet, by consistently portraying women and fetuses as separate persons in the visual and rhetorical fields, the pro-life establishment more easily persuades the reluctant masses wedded to western liberalism and the concept of the rights-bearing individual that fetuses are just as deserving, if not more so, of all civil rights afforded to born persons. This assertion of fetal rights assumes an inherent, adversarial conflict between fetuses and women. Heralding the fetus as the primary or only subject whose life is at issue paves the way for the sociocultural and legal disempowerment of women.

The pro-life discourse of fetal personhood seeks literally to embody fetuses, to make them appear so like born persons that there can be virtually no realizable physical and/or ideological distinctions between the two. Marjorie Reiley Maguire illustrates the problem with attributing personhood to fetuses when she states, “It denies the personhood of the woman in whose body the fetus lives, and deprives her of the protection of the law. It denies her personhood because it invades her bodily integrity, which is the basis of her personal autonomy” (11). Maguire demonstrates how the pro-life construction of fetal personhood and its related discourse is inherently problematic from moral and legal standpoints as it is difficult to deny rights to subjects that appear visually and rhetorically embodied, yet also questionable as to which embodied subjects and hence, whose rights, women’s or fetuses’, are primary and take precedence in the course of pregnancy. Instead, she posits a relational status of personhood in which “our personal relatedness to others . . . makes us a person” (13). Scholars Susan Sherwin and Lynn M. Morgan assert similar claims of maternal/fetal relationality. Sherwin contends that “[a] fetus is a unique sort of human entity . . . for it cannot form relationships freely with others, and others cannot readily form relationships with it. . . [C]onnections with any other persons are necessarily indirect and must be mediated through the pregnant woman” (110). Morgan maintains that “[t]he fetus’s capacity for relationality is not determined by its intrinsic characteristics . . . but by the meanings people give it in a social world” (64).

Viewing personhood and pregnancy as relational phenomena avoids hierarchical ordering of women and fetuses while maintaining women’s moral autonomy and independent agency. Regarding the fetus as a relational being means that its existence and

emergence into the physical and social world of born persons cannot be considered separate from a particular pregnant woman's existence. The maternal/fetal relationship is dynamic. Its meaning and hence, the fetus's meaning, is determined by the woman whose life is most intimately intertwined with and most affected by it. Pro-lifers do not recognize the evolving process of maternal/fetal relationality or the social making of human persons. They adhere adamantly to the belief that fetuses are literally "unborn children" whose bodies are entirely separate from pregnant women. Hence, the only relationship they perceive between the two is one that is either wholly adversarial or supportive, and their discourse reflects this binary mode of thinking.

Pro-life rhetoric seeks ultimately and stealthily to undermine women's agency not only by concentrating on the fetus in their promotional materials and protests, but also by appealing to essentialist notions concerning women and motherhood. These notions encompass the ideas that all women are designed, biologically and divinely, to bear children and therefore, should happily and dutifully assume the subservient role of mother in the context of a family values framework.⁷ Pro-life propaganda notoriously refers to pregnant women as "already" mothers and implores them to heed their maternal instincts and protect their unborn children and themselves, secondarily, from the evils of abortion. The pro-life establishment denies any suggestion of women's agency outside of the presupposed biological and divine mandate to protect their offspring. For example, in the brochure It's Your Turn, Karen Black states, "You, as a woman, have strong maternal instincts made to protect your child at any cost. If you violate those instincts and actually pay someone to harm your child, you will bring great emotional damage to yourself." In

this statement, we are told that women and motherhood are inextricably, albeit inexplicably, linked and that to violate this given “truth” is to invite horrible repercussions upon ourselves. In fact, we are led to believe that there exists absolutely no reason (i.e., “at any cost”) for a woman to deny protection to her fetus/child. This brochure provides no analysis of the physical and social conditions affecting women’s lives and virtually no recognition of women’s agency other than the acknowledgement of so-called “maternal instincts” to protect children that do not actually exist. It’s Your Turn effectively pits the woman against the all-hallowed fetus for active agency. In addition, the brochure Did You Know states, “Abortion-on demand laws give to one person (the mother) the legal right to kill another (the baby) in order to solve the first person’s social problem.” Here, we see a more strident representation of maternal/fetal conflict that quite blatantly undermines women’s moral autonomy and reproductive freedom by insinuating that the “social problem” suffered by the “the mother” is frivolous and inconsequential to the issue at hand—the killing of “the baby.” Again, there exists no critical examination of the so-called “social problem[s]” experienced by women.

The American Life League’s My Secret Life/My Secret Death makes a disingenuous attempt to address the pro-choice accusation that pro-lifers care more about fetuses than pregnant women by stating that “[b]oth individuals are people entitled to protection.” However, the message of the fetus as superior subject becomes apparent with the following statement located in the same paragraph as the former: “In the extremely rare cases that continuation of the pregnancy may threaten the life of the mother, all efforts should be made to save both the child and the mother. Intentionally destroying the

life of a developing child—for any reason—is unjust and morally wrong.” Here, despite the assertion that both mothers and fetuses warrant protection, we understand that they do not necessarily warrant equal protection. In fact, though the anonymous rhetorician of My Secret Life/My Secret Death avoids addressing the issue of abortion *specifically* to save the life of a mother (a glaring weakness in her/his argument), her/his use of the phrase “for any reason” indicates that the intentional destruction of fetal life is never an option. The intentional destruction of a woman’s life, even a mother’s life, does not warrant mentioning or commentary as it is beside the pro-lifers’ point—that fetal subjects are primary and the only ones that truly matter. The pro-life establishment’s consistent visual and rhetorical separation of fetuses and pregnant women and relentless focus on the fetus as an embodied and primary subject aim ultimately to disempower women by stripping them of their reproductive agency.

CHAPTER III

ENTER WOMAN, EXIT FETUS: PRO-CHOICE RHETORIC OF RIGHTS AND CHOICES

Recognizing that pro-lifers seek ultimately to disenfranchise women by controlling their reproductive capacities, the pro-choice establishment strives to maintain a strong voice for women's rights to make decisions about their pregnant bodies. Mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations such as PPFA and NARAL provide an oppositional force against the pro-life establishment well-funded by right-wing fundamentalists. Since the *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion in 1973, PPFA and NARAL along with other feminist and liberal organizations have waged a steady campaign to counter the increasingly aggressive tactics of the pro-life contingency. Their message consistently reflects "rights-based" rhetoric that elevates women as primary subjects whose rights, especially to bodily integrity, cannot be justly violated for any reason. Since their discourse tends to focus solely on women and the threats to women's agency, the fetus inevitably assumes the status of secondary subject or non-subject in much of PPFA's and NARAL's promotional literature and public discourse. From a mainstream pro-choice feminist perspective, the woman takes center stage, displacing the fetus to the far shadows, and perhaps far back into the dressing room.

Some pro-choice feminists have attempted to address the pro-life discourse of fetal personhood by focusing mainly on the concept of personhood and whether or not the fetus constitutes a person. Their arguments, however shrewd, have not proven persuasive in a larger context. For example, in "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion," Mary Anne Warren enumerates five traits (i.e. "consciousness;" "reasoning;" "self-motivated activity;" "the capacity to communicate, by whatever means;" and "the presence of self concepts, and self-awareness") that she deems "most central to the concept of personhood" and concludes that "a fetus is a human being which is not yet a person, and which therefore cannot coherently be said to have full moral rights" (12-13). In "A Defense of Abortion," Judith Jarvis Thomson implies that simply being a person with a need does not guarantee a person the unfettered right to fulfill that need. She appears to convey a more nuanced discussion of personhood and abortion by implying that she does believe in some restraints on abortion. Nevertheless, at the end of her article, Thomson states, "[I]t should be remembered that we have only been pretending throughout that the fetus is a human being from the moment of conception. A very early abortion is surely not the killing of a person, and so is not dealt with by anything I have said here" (66). Warren and Thomson articulate well-developed philosophical bases for their opinions regarding personhood in general and fetal personhood in particular. However, the masses may perceive their rhetoric as cold and detached because their arguments are abstract and fail to convey an empathetic sense of fetal value. Warren's and Thomson's discourse most certainly offends the pro-life contingency represented largely by religious fundamentalists but also risks offending a significant number of moderate thinkers who

simply cannot be persuaded by their detached rhetoric on such emotionally and spiritually profound topics as personhood and abortion. Thus, we understand why mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations like PPFA and NARAL choose to avoid publicly articulating a stance similar to Warren's and Thomson's even though many of their supporters (myself for one) may actually agree with their arguments. To do so might risk jeopardizing the current laws protecting a woman's right to choose abortion by alienating the moderate majority that proves pivotal in legislating sociopolitical agendas.

For the most part, mainstream pro-choice feminist discourse refrains from meaningfully addressing the fetus and/or fetal personhood, except indirectly by asserting the primacy of women's subjective agency. These activists prefer appealing to individuals' concerns about women's right to bodily integrity and invasions of personal privacy. For example, an April 2005 membership renewal letter from Karen Pearl, Interim President of PPFA, implores the reader to consider "all the new threats we face today . . . the dangerous new infringements on your medical privacy . . . pharmacists that refuse to fill prescriptions for contraceptives . . . and the growing likelihood of a rightward tilt on the Supreme Court which will further jeopardize your right to choose" (1). This four-page appeal for monetary support for PPFA's initiatives does not once mention the fetus. It mentions the word "abortion" only four times, and three of those instances are within the same short paragraph that discusses "how much Planned Parenthood has done to keep abortion safe and legal" (2). Pearl tries enthusiastically to convince the reader of the multiple meanings of "pro-choice"—most importantly, that pro-choice does not just refer to abortion. She cites four areas in which PPFA works to

expand choices for women: “contraception, sexuality education, disease prevention, and treatment” (2). Through its rhetorical focus on rights and privacy and judicious use of the term “abortion,” Pearl’s letter illustrates PPFA’s recent strategy to attempt to broaden its appeal to those indifferent to or uncomfortable with abortion—a strategy for which it deserves considerable praise. However, by neglecting to discuss the fetus, except indirectly via a few brief references to prenatal care, this letter implies (intentionally or not) that the status of the fetus is simply a non-issue.

An e-mail newsletter dated May 31, 2005, from NARAL Pro-Choice America reflects the following message from its president, Nancy Keenan: “The Supreme Court is going to once again look at whether we or politicians control our personal decisions. . . . Whenever a case on choice is heard in the Supreme Court, the American values of freedom and personal responsibility inherent in a woman’s right to choose are on the line.” Here, we are led to believe that the rights of women to serve as the ultimate decision-makers regarding their bodies are in jeopardy. Disdainful politicians are poised to strip them away at a moment’s notice. Lest we fail to grasp the gravity of the situation, Keenan follows up with the assertion that the absolute core values of American⁸ culture are going on trial. This quote from the newsletter implores us to believe that the bedrock institutions of our society are under attack. Who would not be concerned about threats to such deeply ingrained American values as freedom and individual responsibility? Keenan implies that we can all unite around our shared American values and defend them if nothing else. Mainstream pro-choice sympathizers may find this vague appeal to patriotic sensibilities satisfying to their egos. However, this elitist and classist rhetorical approach

ignores the concrete realities of many women's lives, particularly those of the poor, people of color, and other disenfranchised groups, that preclude fighting for such abstract ideas as freedom and privacy. Many women within these groups struggle just to survive socioeconomically and spiritually on a daily basis within our pro-capitalist, racist, patriarchal society. They lack the luxury of time and energy to support progressive ideals that in reality will have little direct effect on their lived experiences. While they understand the meaning and relevance of pro-choice as it relates to abortion, disadvantaged and/or disenfranchised groups (i.e., those outside the mostly white, middle and upper class demographic) and pro-life proponents definitely understand that rhetoric focusing on abstract ideals of freedom and privacy leaves out a key player in the discussion—the fetus, a perceived underdog for whom quite a few are willing to root in the battle for the courts and “American values.” Given the perpetual assaults on reproductive agency, mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations' continued inattention to the fetus will prove far more damaging to women's empowerment than what they might actually say about it.

In keeping mum about the fetus, mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations like PPFA and NARAL have allowed the pro-life establishment free reign in the public, discursive arena. Pro-lifers constantly bombard the masses with grossly exaggerated fetal images and appeals to support fetal rights. They have engaged the pro-choice contingency on the latter's own terms (i.e., rights) and with significant success, whereas the pro-choice contingency has consistently failed to acknowledge more than barely the most pressing rhetorical point of the pro-life argument—the value of fetal life. As a pro-

choice feminist, I cannot offer a definitive answer to the value of fetal life because I do not believe one exists. In the abstract, I value fetuses as potential human lives and believe that such lives deserve our care and concern. I also believe both actual and potential human lives may be justifiably taken under various circumstances. On a personal level, I have never been pregnant and hence, cannot speak from lived experience about the fetus's value. Even if I were to claim the authority of experience, it would be *my* particular experience, and I would be expressing the value of *my* fetus's potential life.

Many of the women with whom I work articulate a nuanced understanding of the value of their fetuses even as they choose to abort them. They talk about being too young/old to have a newborn, risking grave illness or death to continue a pregnancy, and not being able to care properly for a child or another child. They voice these carefully deliberated concerns with mixed emotions that signify their accountability to themselves, their loved ones, and their fetuses. Their stories reflect the valuing of many intertwining lives. When women choose to have abortions, they are not dismissing the value of fetal life but simply indicating that their lives and/or the lives of those closest to them take precedence at a particular point in time. Different women at different times will value their fetuses differently. I cannot ignore the value that women assign to the fetuses that I help abort and still maintain that I am empowering them. Doing so would be tantamount to invalidating their lived experiences. Likewise, activists who wish to support women's agency cannot treat the fetus as a non-issue and expect these very women to identify with abstract ideals and the negation of their realities.

Furthermore, when mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations neglect to articulate publicly a discussion of the value of the fetus, they leave the discursive field open to a few significant voices whose opinions are then perceived or interpreted with the help of the sensationalistic media as (mis)representative of the entire cause. For example, in “Our Bodies, Our Souls,” Naomi Wolf criticizes pro-choice feminists for ignoring and hence, dehumanizing the fetus in public discussions and for their “reliance instead on a political rhetoric in which the foetus means nothing” (23). However, Wolf asserts the moral depravity of abortion and how the pro-choice movement needs to recognize publicly the inherent “evil” of abortion. For example, she states, “What she [Norma McCorvey⁹] and all of us deserve is an abortion-rights movement willing publicly to mourn the evil—necessary evil though it may be—that is abortion. We must have a movement that acts with moral accountability and without euphemism” (24). While Wolf’s call for moral accountability on behalf of pro-choice feminists is noble, the moral accountability to which she refers centers on the individual woman’s spiritual/religious redemption and self-flagellation for having been so callously irresponsible as to become pregnant. Wolf seems to assert that there exists a hierarchy among women who seek abortions—those who deserve them due to the “more moral” reasons of health risks and poverty and those who do not deserve them by virtue of their blatant personal irresponsibility but should nevertheless be allowed them because that is what a “free” society affords its citizens. Her call to speak “without euphemism” reflects her concern for ethical activism. However, doing so can be dangerously disempowering to women in our patriarchal, misogynistic society. I agree that it is unethical to speak ambiguously

about abortion to women who choose it, but I disagree with using terms such as “killing,” “brutality,” and “evil” in the context of a conversation on abortion. To do so is to link incontrovertibly the terms together so that the term “abortion” becomes tainted and loaded. Women inevitably feel increased shame and the stigma of abortion when it is spoken about in such a way, and their agency is consequently minimized. Though Wolf makes some salient points about how pro-choice feminists have ceded ground to anti-abortion forces by failing to speak about the morality of abortion, her rhetoric is rife with self-righteous, classist overtones that fare no better in countering, and actually play into, pro-life contentions that abortion is evil and therefore should be outlawed.

Most importantly, Wolf’s call for individual, rather than a collective moral accountability for women facing unplanned/unwanted pregnancies is misguided and non-feminist. Her rhetoric of moral accountability is detrimental to the pro-choice feminist movement because it neglects the social conditions affecting women’s decisions and society’s complicity with sexist, racist, and classist structures of domination. Were the mainstream pro-choice feminist movement to adopt the strident, “non-euphemistic” rhetoric asserted by Wolf, it would probably alienate itself further from the masses and, thus, jeopardize women’s agency even more so than through its dogged focus on the rhetoric of “choice.” Mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations have rightfully not appropriated Wolf’s rhetoric, but by leaving the discursive field open to a few opinionated individuals like her, they have allowed the pro-life establishment to monopolize public discourse and further marginalize women’s lives.

While mainstream pro-choice feminists' failure to engage the fetus in public discussions constitutes a key limiting factor in their discourse, their consistent focus on arguing for women's rights to bodily integrity and to privacy and their more recent impassioned twist on the terms "choice" and "justice," have failed to counter effectively the pro-life establishment's discourse of fetal personhood. Current mainstream pro-choice feminist rhetoric reflects the tactic of trying to redefine choice by broadening its definition so that it is not so readily connotative of abortion. Notably, organizations such as PPFA and NARAL have recognized the critical need to widen the scope of their activism to combat the increasing polarization of the abortion issue that has dominated so much of contemporary discussions on reproductive issues. However, they have done so in a way as to make a subtle mockery (in light of multiple institutional and structural forms of domination within U.S. society) of the two key terms, "choice" and "justice," in the struggle to maintain women's rights. For example, in an April 2005 letter to supporters the Interim President of PPFA, Karen Pearl, exclaims:

But, that [abortion] is hardly all that "pro-choice" means—and hardly the end of the pro-choice work of Planned Parenthood! . . . [I]t also means more choices of contraceptives that can prevent unintended pregnancy; reality-based sexuality education so young people make informed choices about their lives and relationships; and more choices of health care providers for all Americans (author's emphases). (2)

Each of these aspects of choice is undeniably important, but the message lacks any concern for the social factors that affect how choices are made (e.g., concrete factors such

as poverty, lack of education, violence, and institutional factors such as sexism, racism, and classism) and does not reflect a commitment on behalf of PPFA to work to address and ameliorate the conditions that impact and stratify the choices for many individuals. Through this statement, we understand PPFA's message of expanding reproductive choices, an admittedly worthwhile goal. We also grasp the subtler message of detaching "choice" from its customary linkage with "abortion." Most saliently, Pearl's statement shows little concern for the "choice" to carry one's pregnancy to term. Should an organization committed to expanding reproductive choices not at least address more than barely one of the most obvious choices to be made? Mainstream pro-choice language not only reflects a disappearing fetus but also a tacit dismissal of pregnancy and birth as a real option for the very women (e.g., the poor) its supporters claim to serve.

By choosing to focus their rhetoric on the prevention and termination of unplanned/unwanted pregnancies, mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations like PPFA effectively hinder women's agency because they fail to view the lives of women holistically. To hear PPFA tell it, women have more reproductive choices as a result of their efforts. In reality, those choices remain severely limited for a significant number of women in that they do not permissibly include the choice to have a child. Specifically, poor women of color receiving public assistance possess limited reproductive options due to state measures designed to curb their fertility. Andrea Smith, co-founder of Incite! Women of Color Against Violence and Assistant Professor of American Culture and Women's Studies at the University of Michigan, cites "family caps for TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families)" (128) as a deterrent to poor women's

reproduction and critiques PPFA's emphasis on population control and uncritical promotion of various contraceptives whose safety has been questioned (e.g., Norplant and Depo Provera) as oppressive to poor women of color who may have no other options. If these women qualify for Medicaid, they can opt for sterilization but not abortion in many states. Despite their dire financial situation, poor women of color find ways to procure abortions. According to the Alan Guttmacher Institute's "Facts in Brief: Induced Abortion in the United States," as of May 2005, "Black women are more than 3 times as likely as white women to have an abortion, and Hispanic women are 2 ½ times as likely." The Institute also asserts the following: "Compared to non-Hispanic white women, Hispanic and black women are more likely to rely on the 3-month injectable or no [birth control] method," and "poor and low-income women are more than twice as likely as higher income women to use the 3-month injectable." If they do not desire sterilization and want to avoid abortion (rarely covered by Medicaid), poor women of color may opt for long-acting contraceptives, despite their many side effects, as a last resort. Failing to acknowledge and support measures that recognize the full range of reproductive choices for all women is where the rhetorical and legislative lobbying might of mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations stops short and fails to empower women.

NARAL Pro-Choice America employs an ultimately disempowering strategy for women through its current "Choose Justice" campaign aimed at opposing the nomination of anti-choice judges to state and federal courts, most importantly, the Supreme Court.¹⁰ For example, an e-mail alert from NARAL on June 15, 2005, calls for downloading a petition entitled "Nine Days for Justice" for supporters to collect signatures from those

opposing anti-choice, extremist judicial nominations. The e-mail alert states, “We’ll send the petitions to President Bush to send a message that the majority of Americans support the nomination of Supreme Court Justices who have demonstrated a commitment to protecting individual freedom, including the right to choose.” In this statement, the key, troubling phrase is “individual freedom.” Individual freedom is certainly one of the bedrock institutions of U.S. society, yet it neglects the notion of any collective or societal responsibility for the well-being and inherent equality of others. The right to choose may be an individual act, but it is never made in a sociocultural vacuum. NARAL’s message, a reflection of the values of western liberalism, does not address this issue. In fact, the rhetorical message seems to imply that the only obstacle standing in the way of women’s liberation is their “right” to choose. Sociocultural factors (e.g., race, class, age, ability, education level, and religion) and institutionalized oppression do not factor into the equation and are, thus, left out of the discursive field. Where is the “justice” in this scenario?

Clearly, mainstream pro-choice feminist rhetoric regards the fetus as a non-subject or non-issue—a serious weakness. We also see through its failure to acknowledge and examine holistically its use of the terms “choice” and “justice” that pro-choice rhetoric considers institutional and structural forms of domination to be a non-issue in the exercise of free “choice.” By neglecting to address the fetus, pro-choice rhetoric fails to iterate the relational status of pregnancy, which effectively reinforces the pro-life discourse of fetal personhood and hinders women’s subjective agency. By ignoring the sociocultural forces of oppression that influence and sometimes dictate the choices

individuals make, pro-choice rhetoric resembles pro-life rhetoric in that both subscribe to a moralistic ideal of individual responsibility and culpability, and serve to control and circumscribe women's reproductive agency. Meanwhile, the state injects its sexist, racist, classist, and capitalist motives into both discourses and profits off of both camps' complicity.

CHAPTER IV

UNCLE SAM AND THE LAYING ON OF HANDS: THE RED, THE WHITE, AND THE WOMB

In U.S. society, the state (especially under the George W. Bush administration) has a compelling interest in supporting and promoting the discourse of fetal personhood. This interest centers on maintaining and further entrenching institutional forms of oppression, such as sexism, racism, classism, capitalism, and eugenics. Promoting the discourse of fetal personhood endears the state to a well-funded block of conservative and religious fundamentalist constituents who seek to reinforce hierarchical dominance within the family and society. This goal parallels that of the state, which has taken an ever-increasing and bizarrely intrusive interest in the lives of individual citizens, especially since the events of September 11, 2001, in the name of protection against terrorism and ironically, democracy and freedom. Both pro-life and pro-choice rhetoric intentionally and unintentionally reinforce state oppression of certain groups of individuals and collude with state measures of coercion and social control. In effect, both establishments' discourses reflect fundamentally unjust motives and serve ultimately to disempower women.

Pro-life rhetoric often equates abortion with murder of innocent "unborn children" and those who perform or assist with abortions as murderers or conspirators. Given the fickleness of the voting public, the state comprehends the strategic value of

protecting “innocent life,” especially the lives of those who cannot defend themselves. After all, no one wants to vote for someone who supports the “murder” of innocent, “unborn children.” The tactic of likening or identifying abortion with murder serves to heighten and justify indefinitely state interest in reproduction and women’s subjective agency. In effect, pro-lifers continuously strive to portray abortion as criminal in an effort to goad politicians, legislators, and the voting masses into believing that abortion is murder and should be illegal.

In fact, pro-lifers have become quite clever in crafting their message to appear as though they are promoting an anti-racist, anti-classist, and anti-eugenic agenda to obscure the real racist, classist, and pro-capitalist objectives of their right-wing, conservative ideology. For example, a pamphlet entitled The Choice Nazi American Terrorist published by Life Dynamics, Inc., in Denton, Texas, compares the pro-choice position to the Holocaust perpetrated by the Nazis and the lynchings of African Americans perpetrated by the Ku Klux Klan and white supremacists. The author goes into great detail comparing the pro-choice movement’s valorization of Margaret Sanger to the Nazis’ and Klan’s glorification of such individuals as Dr. Josef Mengele and Adolf Hitler. The pamphlet’s statements are highly inflammatory and are meant to incite anger and extreme disgust. Some examples include: “Klan Parenthood: We Put the Hood in Parenthood;” “The Real Terrorists: Choice Nazis kill more Americans every single day than Al-Qaeda killed on 911;” and “Lynching is for amateurs.” The author even goes so far as to define the “cannula” used in abortions as “a weapon of mass destruction . . . used to locate, kill and dismember unborn children during elective abortions.” These

statements reflect the pro-life mission of criminalizing abortion as a miraculous cure for the so-called “American Holocaust” in which innocent lives are being slaughtered at an alarming rate. The state likes nothing better than to be portrayed as the benevolent behemoth that protects innocent, defenseless lives in the supposed interests of equality, freedom, and democracy. However, The Choice Nazi American Terrorist fails to assess how such institutionalized oppressions as racism and classism shape experiences and dictate the choices people make. In this way, the pro-life rhetoric (blatant propaganda in this case) colludes with the state in displaying faux concern for innocent lives while all the while preserving and furthering existing structures of domination that serve ultimately to disempower certain groups like the poor and people of color, specifically women within these groups.

Andrea Smith echoes this sentiment in “Beyond Pro-Choice Versus Pro-Life: Women of Color and Reproductive Justice.” She states:

An interrogation of the assumptions behind the pro-life movement suggests that what distinguishes the pro-life position is not so much a commitment to life (since criminalization promotes death rather than life, particularly in communities of color and poor communities), but rather a commitment to criminal justice interventions in reproductive justice issues. (123)

Smith exposes the true beliefs and motives of the pro-life establishment—that women’s reproductive agency (more narrowly, the right to obtain an abortion) should be minimized and criminalized on an individual basis in much the same way as poor women

and minorities in order to avoid any suggestion of collective or state responsibility in protecting the well-being of all its citizens, not just the voting, campaign-contributing ones. Life Dynamics, Inc.'s The Choice Nazi American Terrorist demonstrates the complex interweaving of pro-life and state propaganda to promote fetal life at all costs. "Born life," on the other hand, does not warrant attention, much less nuanced discussion. We understand the pro-life establishment's perception of born life to be an individual or "family" matter into which the state should not intrude, barring mitigating circumstances, under the rubric of privacy.

Janine P. Hole notes the eerily portentous association between nationalist ideologies and increasing state control of women's reproductive capacities. Her comments are particularly salient in light of the U.S.'s preemptive and continuing aggression in Afghanistan and Iraq since the tragedies of September 11, 2001, and the Bush administration's subsequent unleashing of zealously nationalistic propaganda under the guise of promoting freedom and democracy. Hole states, "[N]ationalist discourses evoke a unified, singular tradition and destiny as necessary to the survival of an 'authentic' motherland. These discourses position themselves as correctives to the increased fragmentation and pluralization of voices and interests that democratization affords" (756). Given the wavering support for the continuing war and loss of U.S. soldiers' lives in Iraq, the state needs to promote simultaneously fear of outsiders and reverence for human life in order to shore up support for a war that is becoming increasingly unpopular in the public eye. The state utilizes pro-life rhetoric to bolster its aim of portraying itself as a "life-revering" soldier for peace, freedom, and democracy.

According to the state and especially Life Dynamics, Inc.'s The Choice Nazi American Terrorist, U.S. lives are the only ones that matter. Therefore, railing against abortion on the home front through the assertion of fetal personhood is a perfect ruse for the state to appear sensitive to the value of "life" while simultaneously denying the value of "life" overseas. The state and pro-life establishment capitalizes on and manipulates the masses' fear of future terrorist threats to convey a "pro-life" rhetoric that, in turn, mollifies public concern about what's really occurring outside U.S. borders (i.e., blatant irreverence for and murder of innocent lives). In reality, the state and the pro-life establishment care very little about the value of life, born life that is, anywhere and seek only to bolster the nationalist sentiment necessary to allow continued warmongering behavior on behalf of a rogue political administration and its racist, classist, right-wing constituent base.

The pro-choice establishment fares no better in refuting the capitalist and racist ideologies of the state in its public rhetoric. With their insistent focus on the discourse of choice, rights, and privacy, mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations like PPFA and NARAL collude with state motives to maintain the status quo (i.e., unbridled capitalism) and institute measures of social control (e.g., involuntary sterilization and/or coercion to abort) for certain groups, namely poor people of color. For example, prior to the November 2004 presidential election, NARAL initiated a blitzkrieg of mailings urging its members to vote for John Kerry in order to protect the hard-won and all-hallowed "right to choose." One mailing states, "Soon, these eyes [John Ashcroft's and George W. Bush's] could be on your most private, intimate medical records. . . . What about your

right to privacy? On November 2, VOTE to stop Bush's assault on your freedom of choice and right to privacy." Another quips, "It wasn't long ago . . . that a woman's choices were much more limited. . . . John Kerry believes that women must always have the right to make their own decisions, free from government interference." These assertions beg for qualification; to exactly which women does this message refer? The former statement assumes that privacy is an inalienable right afforded to everyone (i.e., U.S. citizens) that cannot be infringed upon by the state. In actuality, many people, especially women who compose a large number of the poor and minority populations who rely on various governmental programs (e.g., TANF, food stamps, Medicaid, the [W]omen, [I]nfants, and [C]hildren program, and subsidized housing) to survive, can expect no such right to be recognized by the state. The state has access to the most intimate details of their lives on a daily basis, and these women are regularly forced to recount those details in an effort to continue qualifying for governmental assistance. The choices they make are often dictated by the state, from where they live to what foods they are able to purchase to which doctors and health care organizations they are allowed to visit. Where do the right to choose and the right to privacy fit in this equation?

The second aforementioned mailing would have us women believe that our options are no longer limited the way they used to be thanks to our legally protected right to choose abortion that hangs precariously in the balance and that John Kerry has promised to support. This rhetorical message is delivered with a backdrop of a 1950's motif in which a white woman, wearing an apron, proceeds to iron a basket of clothes in her kitchen, all the while smiling docilely at the camera. Clearly, NARAL is trying to

imply that repeal of the right to choose (an abortion) will likely spiral downward to the point where women have just as few “rights” as they did a half century ago. This could well be the case and is worth pointing out to the masses. But, again, to which women does this message really apply? It applies specifically to middle and upper class, white women who aspire to work outside the home and to defy the conservative ideal of a happy, dependent homemaker. Options for these women are less limited than they were years ago. However, what this message does not take into account is the fact that for the poor and women of color, choices remain limited and extremely so in some circumstances. Many poor and minority women have always worked outside the home in order to survive and to provide for their families; there were and are few choices to be made in such a context. Is the only option for survival (i.e., abortion) really a choice? The message subtly implies that workforce participation is the norm and expected choice for modern women and thus reflects a pro-capitalist ideology that reveres paid work and devalues women’s unpaid labor in the home by glorifying it as a private, family sacrifice. In effect, NARAL’s message colludes with the state’s motive to produce as many cogs for the capitalist machine as possible by presenting paid work as the only sensible option or choice.

Mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations further the state’s racist ideologies in much the same way as the pro-life establishment by conveying a message of individual, moral responsibility and culpability for unplanned pregnancy. Much of the thrust of PPFA’s rhetorical mission is the prevention of unplanned pregnancies particularly among those groups (e.g., the poor, people of color, and the disabled) for

whom bearing more children is considered socially unacceptable and a threat to the social order. PPFA appears to subscribe to what Lealle Ruhl describes as the idea of the “willed pregnancy [that] demands that individual women internalize a paradigm of responsibility that assumes forethought and planning in reproductive matters” (“Dilemmas of Will,” 645). Thus, its message often reflects a paternalistic, charitable tone that is meant to convey genuine concern for the plight of the poor and people of color populations while really aiming to instill and reinforce the western ideal of individualism and personal responsibility.

For instance, [P]lanned [P]arenthood of [N]orth [T]exas, a PPFA affiliate, mailed an update to its members in early 2005 detailing all of the reproductive measures scheduled for a vote in the upcoming legislative session in Texas. The mailing laments the lack of “complete funding for family planning services.” It specifically states:

These funds provide reproductive health services such as annual exams, birth control, and testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections to *low-income* [my emphasis] women who could not otherwise afford a doctor. Reducing access to services for *these* [my emphasis] women will only increase the numbers of unintended pregnancies, infections, and abortions.

While it is admirable that PPNT is working on behalf of low-income women, this statement rhetorically links “low-income” women with a lack of self-control and implies that nothing short of social upheaval will result if external control measures (e.g., birth control and treatment) are not instituted. This attitude is similar to that of Margaret

Sanger, the founder of the American Birth Control League, PPFA's forerunner, whose association with proponents of racist and eugenicist ideologies problematizes her achievements in legalizing and increasing access to birth control and helps to perpetuate to this day the idea that reproduction among certain populations (e.g., the poor, people of color, and the disabled) must be curbed. To its credit, PPFA provides information on its website that challenges many of the allegations of racism and pro-eugenics leveled against Sanger by various critics. It also states that Sanger "agreed with the 'progressives' of her day who favored:" incentives for the sterilization of certain groups, immigration restrictions for the "diseased and 'feeble-minded'," and the placement of "illiterates, paupers, unemployables, criminals, prostitutes, and dope-fiends on farms." In reference to this information, the organization's website states, "Planned Parenthood Federation of America finds these views objectionable and outmoded." The problem with PPFA's discourse about Margaret Sanger is not that it tries to debunk erroneous information, but that it fails to interrogate in a meaningful way how some of her beliefs and associations with racist, eugenics proponents helped promote the state-sanctioned, systematic oppression of marginalized individuals by controlling their reproduction.

The eugenics ideology of reproductive control and manipulation persists within the mainstream pro-choice feminist discourse as demonstrated by PPFA's continual, narrow focus on lower socioeconomic groups and their reproductive health needs as determined by the white, middle and upper middle class dominant groups. Dorothy Roberts, author of Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty, asserts that Sanger's views were "distinct from those of her eugenicist

colleagues,” but that she “nevertheless promoted two of the most perverse tenets of eugenic thinking: that social problems are caused by reproduction of the socially disadvantaged and that their child-bearing should be deterred” (81). Roberts also states, “In a society marked by racial hierarchy, these principles inevitably produced policies designed to reduce Black women’s fertility” (81). These policies include widespread coercive sterilization of African American, Native American, and Latina women. Roberts notes how Medicaid funding played a role in the mass numbers of medically unnecessary hysterectomies and hence, permanent sterilizations performed on Black women in the 1970’s as doctors had “a financial incentive to perform the more extensive operation” (90). Myla Vicenti Carpio cites the coercive sterilization of an estimated “42% of American Indian women of childbearing age” (50) as of 1976 due to gross malpractice by Indian Health Services personnel. María Milagros López discusses the U.S.-initiated sterilization campaigns in Puerto Rico following World War II designed to encourage capitalist investment on the island. Lopez states, “Puerto Rico had a 34 to 35 percent [sterilization] rate in 1968” (195) as opposed to the U.S.’s five percent.

More recently, we see racist and eugenics ideology at work in efforts to coerce poor women on public assistance into receiving long-acting, injectable or implanted contraceptives with questionable safety records, such as Depo Provera and Norplant. In “Race, Class, and Gender in Punitive Welfare Reform: Social Eugenics and Welfare Policy,” Denise Pierson-Balik notes the institution of stringent family caps for those receiving AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) by multiple states during the 1990’s. She asserts:

Many states offered cash incentives to women on welfare for the insertion of the device [Norplant] and bonuses for each year they kept the device in their arm. . . . Other states considered legislation that would mandate Norplant implants as a condition of welfare receipt. Several other states even considered legislation that would provide cash incentives in the form of bonuses and increased grant amounts for women on assistance who agreed to permanent sterilization.

Moreover, federal Medicaid funds currently pay for sterilization but cannot be used to cover abortions except in the instances of rape, incest, or to save the life of the pregnant woman. According to the Alan Guttmacher Institute's "Facts in Brief: Contraceptive Use" as of March 2005, "[S]terilization is the leading method among black women and Hispanic women, while the pill is the leading method for white women." Thus, women on Medicaid likely face increasing pressure to undergo sterilization, especially if they live in a state with family caps. Also, Depo Provera is now being manufactured as a generic drug and is less expensive. In the clinic where I work, the price has fallen 33% since I started. The injection currently costs fifty dollars and lasts for thirteen weeks. From an anecdotal perspective, more women do appear to be choosing this option, but I have not noticed a demographic trend. Nevertheless, the fact that the drug is now cheaper may result in its being marketed even more forcefully toward the poor and women of color.

By focusing their rhetoric on providing services for low-income women, many who are women of color, and relying on the discourses of control and choice, mainstream

pro-choice feminist organizations such as PPFA and NARAL reinforce racist and classist ideologies of the state. PPFA's failure, in particular, to recognize and interrogate its oppressive ideological origins demonstrates its complicity with the state's motives to keep the number of "undesirables" in check. It also makes the organization vulnerable to attacks by pro-lifers such as the rhetorician of The Choice Nazi American Terrorist, who states, "To this day, Planned Parenthood has never disavowed Margaret Sanger or her elitist and racist agenda." Instead of articulating an argument that criticizes the sociocultural and historical conditions that work to systematically disenfranchise the poor and people of color, mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations have consistently chosen to support initiatives that target these groups' supposed overpopulation. These organizations hail the concepts of choice, rights, privacy, and justice as universal. However, without a concerted, ongoing deconstruction of their ideological underpinnings, these organizations will continue to reflect complicity with state-sanctioned racism, classism, eugenics, capitalism, and nationalism.

FORGING A FEMINIST RHETORIC OF RECLAMATION

Mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations must reclaim the discourse of fetal personhood from the pro-life contingency who uses it as a moral weapon against women's agency. They must reclaim the discourse of fetal personhood and reframe it to reflect moral and/or ethical consideration of all the intertwining lives and potential lives (i.e., fetal) involved. The first step in this process involves a publicly voiced commitment from organizations like PPFA and NARAL to critique their rhetorical practices that focus exclusively on rights, choices, and privacy. When doing so, they must keep foremost in mind the audience they claim to represent—*all* women. Tailoring their discourse to a narrow base of supporters (i.e., a mostly white, middle and upper class, pro-capitalist constituency) effectively negates their message of championing and expanding reproductive freedom for the poor, people of color, and other marginalized groups. Mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations must understand that working for increased prevention of unplanned pregnancies and treatment efforts for sexually transmitted illnesses, while necessary and important to societal well-being, does nothing to address the actual sociocultural conditions, such as poverty and institutionalized oppressions of sexism, racism, and classism, that make choices and rights irrelevant to so many women. Also, they must realize how their philosophical and rhetorical complicity with a pro-capitalist ideology that values participation in the paid workforce above all

effectively colludes with the state's motive to perpetuate the existence of a working class. PPFA and NARAL need to grasp how their ideological collusion with the state translates into tacit support (by way of targeted funding and outreach programs) for coercive measures that aim to control and exploit the fertility of certain populations.

Accordingly, the mainstream pro-choice feminist movement must profess publicly its individual and collective accountability for wrongs perpetrated in the name of rights, choices, and privacy. Espousing the rhetoric of rights and choices in a society that valorizes freedom and self-agency, yet guarantees these ideals only to the select few who can afford them, is hypocritical and fundamentally unjust. The time has come for mainstream pro-choice feminists to radicalize their politics and insist that the organizations to which they offer political and monetary support transform their missions and rhetoric to reflect a discourse that truly encapsulates the diverse concerns of a pluralistic constituency. We must apologize to the masses for waging an exceedingly narrow and futile campaign that pits women against fetuses. Most importantly, we must apologize to the poor and women of color who have born the brunt of our racist, classist, pro-capitalist mission and paid literally with their lives. The way to accomplish this task is to apologize publicly in as many forums as possible—on television, on the World Wide Web, in press conferences, in newsprint, in mass mailings, in speeches, in grassroots education at the community level, in lobbying efforts—for the racist, classist wrongs dismissed by the movement. Mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations must articulate a strategic paradigm shift that will demonstrate clearly our commitment to fighting for the expansion of the rights and choices of all women, and hence all families.

This paradigm shift requires that we refocus our advocacy efforts and reframe our message to reflect concern for far more than the right to choose an abortion. Women do not simply need the right to choose abortion; they need and deserve viable, alternative choices. Feminists for Life of America, an anti-abortion organization, articulates a similar agenda, but seeks to criminalize all abortions while relying on essentialist conceptions of motherhood much like their pro-life counterparts. The organization claims to be “Pro Woman, Pro Life” but refuses to recognize pregnancy prevention as an important concern for women. Their website states, “Preconception issues including abstinence and contraception are outside of our mission.” Moreover, Feminists for Life claims to be a “nonpartisan organization that does not endorse or support candidates of any party.” How they plan to work for systemic changes that would enable more women to bring their pregnancies to term is not addressed. This group is non-feminist and simply a ruse for pro-life, right-wing, conservative dogma. Activists who claim the label “feminist” are obligated to honor the diversity of all women’s experiences and needs. Accordingly, pro-choice feminist activists must advocate legislatively for systemic changes, such as a living minimum wage, universal health care, subsidized childcare, fair housing, job training initiatives, and domestic violence prevention efforts—concrete issues that profoundly affect women’s rights and the choices they are able to make. We must hold ourselves accountable to all women and work within an inclusive paradigm so that the masses, particularly the poor and people of color, can trust that mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations understand and empathize with the complex realities of their lives.

Mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations must actively include the voices of women-of-color activists in developing new rhetorical practices that reflect heterogeneous concerns. PPFA and NARAL must seek to build coalitions with entities, such as the SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective. SisterSong's website states that the collective was formed in 1997 and consists of "70 local, regional, and national grassroots organizations and more than 400 individuals, as well as white and male allies" who work collectively on issues of reproductive justice for women of color in the United States. In "The 'SisterSong Collective': Women of Color, Reproductive Health and Human Rights," Ross et al. state, "Women of color recognize the fundamental and symbiotic relationship between individual and collective human rights, acknowledging that the individual human rights of women of color cannot be protected in a country in which the collective rights of all people of color *and* women are not upheld" (86). Partnering with historically marginalized groups and urging their voices to the forefront of public discussion will reinforce the message that racism, classism, and unchecked pro-capitalist sentiment have no place in a movement committed to expanding choices and rights for all people. Doing so will require that PPFA critically assess its racist and eugenicist ideological underpinnings, how it responds to criticism of its controversial founder, Margaret Sanger, and its complicity with the state's motive to sustain oppression of targeted populations (i.e., the poor, people of color, and the disabled) under the guise of social health and order. Building coalitions will also help PPFA and NARAL to reframe their discursive messages to reflect a collective

responsibility for reproductive freedom and women's agency rather than individual culpability.

Finally, mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations must direct their attention to the long-ignored fetus and stop retreating from discussions about fetal value in their rhetorical battles with the pro-life establishment. This has long been a losing strategy even though I believe it was embraced with good intentions. Pro-choice feminists understand the slipperiness of the fetal personhood argument; we understand its ambiguities. If we concede that the fetus is a person or a human being, we risk jeopardizing the laws that protect women's rights to bodily integrity and hence, their right to choose abortion. We fear that acknowledging fetal personhood will pave the way for further state interference in pregnancy-related matters, thus disempowering women. However, we also realize that denying fetal personhood negates the lived experiences of many women who bond emotionally with their fetuses as they would with born persons and who mourn both losses equally. Contrary to pro-life accusation, we who assist with abortions question ourselves about the morality of abortion, and we each make a separate, differently situated peace with our actions. Assisting with over several thousand abortions has led me to realize that fetuses do have value as potential lives and reaffirmed my belief that the individual women carrying them are in the best position to weigh the value of their fetuses' potential lives along with all the other lives intersecting with their own.

My question is: Why are mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations unwilling to articulate these conflictive concerns about fetal value and engage in a public moral discussion? The fear of putting a chink in the unified armor of the pro-choice feminist

movement has drawn our attention away from a critical detail (the fetus) in the discussion—a detail that obviously matters not just to pro-lifers, but also to the women who seek and receive abortion services from mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations. We could better serve them and the movement by articulating a rhetorical argument that does not leave itself wide open to assaults by the pro-life contingency and religious right for failing to consider the moral status of the fetus along with the woman's or for failing to speak about the fetus. Continuing to espouse a message of rights, choices, and privacy will prove futile in attempting to displace the masses' attention from bruised and bloodied fetuses to abstract constitutional ideals. Does there exist any real competition between these two for the attention of a fickle, apathetic public? Inflammatory rhetoric and graphic displays trump detached, hypothetical situations (i.e., alleged, imminent loss of rights or choices) every time. We in the mainstream pro-choice feminist movement need to grasp this crucial concept and construct a dialogue among ourselves and others that includes the fetus.

We must honor women's feelings toward their fetuses. Mainstream pro-choice feminists must relinquish our dogged insistence on naming the *fetus* and respectfully allow women to define their individual experiences on their own terms. We must reconcile ourselves to the fact that some fetuses are considered babies (when wanted) and some are not (when not wanted). When discussing reproductive freedom and how to expand access, we cannot neglect the fact that some women refer to their fetuses as unborn children or babies even though they elect to have abortions, as is sometimes the case in the clinic where I work. I realize that adopting a relational rather than a

dichotomous view of pregnancy (i.e., woman vs. fetus) complicates the pro-choice movement's desire to present a unified image to the public. A relational view of pregnancy recognizes that a relationship exists between a woman and her fetus, that this relationship is mediated by the individual woman experiencing a particular pregnancy, and that the value of a particular fetus is assigned by the woman who carries it within a specific context. As Sherwin states:

No absolute value attaches to fetuses apart from their relational status, which is determined in the context of their particular development. This is not the same, however, as saying that they have no value at all or that they have merely instrumental value, as some liberals suggest. The value that women place on their own fetuses is the sort of value that attaches to an emerging human relationship. (111)

Shifting to a paradigm that promotes women's agency while simultaneously acknowledging fetal value does complicate the pro-choice movement's rhetoric on the morality of abortion because recognizing that women *and* fetuses have value is not conducive to waging a straightforward argument in the highly polarized reproductive rights debate. Nevertheless, the pro-life establishment has successfully manipulated the pro-choice movement's consistent rhetorical focus on women's rights and privacy to appear as though pro-choice advocates hold nothing less than a capricious, callously indifferent view toward the fetus. If the mainstream pro-choice feminist movement wants to counter effectively this claim, then activists must embrace a fresh dialogue that includes the fetus. Pro-choice feminists cannot be afraid to verbalize the many, diverse

truths of women's lives. I suggest that we move away from reinforcing rhetorically the polarized notion of women's rights over fetal rights (even though some of us may feel this to be the case) and move toward a pluralized, holistic discourse that addresses the real sociocultural conditions that affect women's agency in our patriarchal society.

The pro-life establishment represents a misogynist, right-wing fundamentalist group whose incendiary rhetoric needs to be confronted and critically deconstructed in the public forum on a continual basis. This establishment often characterizes pro-choice feminists as radical extremists or "special interest" fanatics, a strategy that serves to deflect attention from their own fundamentalist position. Those of us who dare to consider the effects of various forms of institutionalized oppression on women's lives and advocate for sociopolitical initiatives to address multiple inequities are, indeed radicals. Radicals need not present the stereotypical extremist approach that the masses have come to expect courtesy of our sensation-driven media. I see no need to mimic the polemical dogmatism of the right-wing pro-life contingency when countering their claims. If anything, presenting a more nuanced discussion of reproductive agency and openly acknowledging that fetuses do have value as potential human lives will appeal to the moderate majority who are likely to find a less polarized viewpoint more convincing. The public will be more apt to listen to the actual message and hopefully understand that one does not have to align oneself solely with women or fetuses in order to participate meaningfully in the moral discourse and to realize the importance of reproductive agency for all women.

Positing a relational understanding of women's reproductive agency does not mean that pro-choice feminists must capitulate to the seemingly normative terms of "unborn children" or "baby" when speaking about fetuses. Yet, we must be aware that these terms really are interchangeable for some individuals and that the word "fetus" is too clinical for many people to identify with it. This awareness is especially important to individuals working directly with women facing unwanted pregnancies. In my experience as a nurse in an abortion clinic, very rarely, if ever, do women refer to themselves as pregnant with fetuses. They do not talk about aborting their fetuses. We, the clinic staff, talk to them about fetuses and fetal development in ways that we hope will not offend them or compound the guilt and shame a significant number of them feel. Many of us avoid talking about babies and children at all; it is almost as if we are indulging a war of words and hence ideologies by our reluctance to speak with women about their pregnancies on their own terms. Are we not effectively denying these women's agency when we ignore the terms they use to describe their experiences? Can we not take the chance and trust women to understand that we are not speaking equivocally about abortion if we use the terms "baby" and "abortion" in the same context? I realize that pro-choice feminists risk being labeled (among their own and by the pro-life establishment) as flippant and immoral for conceding to pro-life terminology that confers embodied subjectivity and personhood upon fetuses. But, at what cost to ourselves and the pro-choice feminist movement, do we insist on the dichotomous alternative? We must shatter the pro-life/pro-choice dichotomous rhetoric and advocate for dialogue among competing interests in order to prevent further marginalization of women's subjective agency.

In order to reclaim the discourse of fetal personhood and reframe it to reflect concern for women's agency and fetal value, mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations must endeavor to withstand reinforcing the pro-life/pro-choice dichotomy. A more fruitful strategy would be to initiate a public deconstruction of pro-life rhetoric to expose the subversive implications of fetal rights (e.g., increased state surveillance of pregnant women) and the inherent racist, classist, and pro-capitalist motives undergirding the pro-life agenda. For instance, pro-choice feminists need to expose pro-lifers' religious-based conception of equality before "God" that does not necessarily translate into a belief in equal constitutional rights of all citizens before the state. Although it claims the universal sanctity of human life, the pro-life establishment is quite particular about whose lives actually matter. For instance, pro-lifers need not ponder the lives lost to capital punishment, war, or poverty (all state-sanctioned phenomena) that disproportionately affect marginalized groups because they do not believe that these individuals are equal citizens. They believe people are equal only in the eyes of "God," which has no bearing on how various groups of people are regarded from a human perspective. Thus, we understand how people who claim the pro-life label can still oppose initiatives designed to promote equal opportunity and to ameliorate unjust social conditions, such as poverty.

Furthermore, in "Minority Unborn" Carol Mason provides a critical analysis of ideological collusion among white supremacists (specifically the Ku Klux Klan), militia groups, and Christian fundamentalists to strive for a racially pure (i.e., white) state that rigidly conforms to racist, fundamentalist Christian ideals. Commenting on the

ruminations of Richard McDonald, founder of the State Citizen Service Center, a Christian paramilitary organization, Mason states, “[A]bortions are legal for people of color, whose citizenship is bestowed, by virtue of the Fourteenth Amendment, upon them only when they are ‘born,’ when they have ‘left the womb.’ But abortions are not legal—are criminal . . . for Anglo-Americans, whose citizenship is constitutionally bestowed upon them from the ‘date of conception’” (166). Mason underscores how the racist motives of white supremacists parallel those of the pro-life establishment and lead to ideological acceptance and advocacy for state-sanctioned inequality by both groups. This perverse advocacy manifests in the white supremacists’ support for the abortion of all “non-white” fetuses and more subtly, in the pro-life establishment’s support for coercive measures to control the fertility of “non-white” populations.

Exposing this seemingly unlikely, yet chilling, ideological alliance would help counter pro-lifers’ contention that they are fighting for fetal rights and the rights of the poor and people of color. These pro-life individuals consistently vote for and support politicians who cut subsidies and strip funding from social programs that directly impact the literal and figurative survival of large communities of historically disempowered individuals. Where is the pro-life sentiment in this situation? The opportunity is ripe for mainstream pro-choice feminists to educate the public on the incongruence of pro-life ideology and actions. We need to expose the pro-life establishment’s ideological and rhetorical hypocrisy, so that the masses have something to ponder besides the crafted image of romanticized, bloodied, innocent, fetal persons. This exposure of pro-life complacency must be accompanied by a sustained effort on behalf of PPFA, NARAL,

and other mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations to broaden the scope of their activism to address a multitude of social issues and conditions (e.g., poverty, disease, violence, and lack of affordable housing and educational resources) affecting the choices that women make and to formulate policy initiatives that will combat injustice on many fronts. Only then can these organizations justly valorize the “rights,” “choice,” and “justice” elements of their current rhetorical message.

FEMINIST REFRAMING AND TRANSFORMATION OF THE DISCOURSE OF FETAL PERSONHOOD

Mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations, such as PPFA and NARAL, must embrace a paradigm that acknowledges the relational status of pregnancy, which precludes thinking about women and fetuses in conflictive terms. By refusing to take sides, we position ourselves to participate fully and meaningfully in public discussions on the morality of abortion, whereas the pro-life establishment will likely continue to focus solely on fetuses. Relinquishing abstract and absolutist discourse will help us to promote women's agency while simultaneously acknowledging fetal value. Mainstream pro-choice feminists must become comfortable with speaking out of both sides of our mouths—to diverse groups of women (and men) and about fetuses—in order to revolutionize and reframe the detrimental pro-life discourse of fetal personhood. Speaking out of both sides of one's mouth has a negative connotation in this society because we tend to believe that people who do so possess weak convictions. We assume that these individuals will vacillate capriciously in regard to critical social issues, and we tend to shun them in activist circles for fear that they will make us look like fools for an untenable cause. We dismiss what I define as inclusive or pluralistic speech as typical of ideological turncoats. Yet, it is precisely this nuanced type of speech coming from a variety of perspectives and aimed toward many diverse constituents that will redeem the

mainstream pro-choice feminist movement in its struggle to counter the increasing marginalization of women's agency.

First and foremost, we must initiate a shift in the way that we speak about women and pregnancy in personal and public discourse. Adopting a maternal/fetal relationality approach in mainstream pro-choice feminist discourse challenges the popular pro-life contention that fetal rights take precedence over women's rights. It further serves to break down the pro-life/pro-choice dichotomy by drawing both the woman and fetus in from the margins and centralizing both of them in discussions. Theorizing about and discussing women and fetuses within a maternal/fetal relationality paradigm breaks down the presupposed hierarchical or adversarial relationship made manifest by conventional pro-life/pro-choice polemics. Revising our language with maternal/fetal relationality in mind means that mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations like PPFA and NARAL can no longer speak of universal choice(s) and rights in abstract terms. Our rhetoric must reflect empathetic understanding of the concrete realities of *all* women's lives. It must recognize that the lives of women and the potential lives of fetuses are complexly intertwined, and that maternal/fetal relationships are imbued with personal, cultural, symbolic, and moral meanings that must be taken into account in any critical discussion about abortion and reproductive justice.

We will have to discuss publicly the myriad concerns of pregnant women—women who are pregnant with fetuses/*babies*—and the sociocultural and historical contexts in which choices are made and in which fetuses become wanted/unwanted babies and children. Mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations will now have to

realize the real inequalities within U.S. society, recognize their accountability to all women, and broaden their activism to work for the dismantling of institutional and structural oppressions. A key component of recognizing our accountability is rearticulating the long-cliched slogan “the personal is political.” Privacy is an inalienable aspect of liberty and justice, but a sharp ideological focus on “privacy” ultimately results in the relegation of women’s concerns to the headmaster of the patriarchal household, which precludes any collective or state responsibility for the well-being of women and fetuses.

Embracing a maternal/fetal relationality paradigm requires that mainstream pro-choice feminists welcome multiple voices into the discursive field, which will ensure a more accurate representation of women’s experiences and depolarize further the pro-life/pro-choice dichotomy that alienates and marginalizes women’s agency. Sustained dialogue among divergent perspectives invites controversy but will ultimately result in a more nuanced and just representational discussion of reproductive agency, abortion, and fetal value. Mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations, like PPFA and NARAL, must forgo their strident rhetoric that mimics the pro-life establishment’s fundamentalist discourse and with the help of coalitional forces, focus on transforming our language to reflect ethical consideration of all lives involved. Mainstream pro-choice leaders can start by welcoming voices from sympathetic clergy and religious organizations (e.g. Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice and Catholics for a Free Choice) in order to counter the right wing, fundamentalist pro-life agenda in public forums. Integrating these voices into mainstream pro-choice discourse helps to validate women’s diverse experiences and

independent moral agency at a time when right-wing conservatives are preying on the public's fears of terrorism and cultural attack to justify the systematic disenfranchisement of women, people of color, immigrants, and the poor. Most importantly, mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations must incorporate the opinions and experiences of poor women, women of color, disabled women, young women, and older women into their promotional events and literature and not just in snapshot testimonials of how the organizations have served them so well.

We must undertake a deliberate effort to herald the ordinary experiences of women who face unwanted/unplanned pregnancies as truly extraordinary in the sense that they represent the common reasons most women seek abortions and are thus most deserving of our attention. We in the mainstream pro-choice feminist movement have tended to focus on extremes in our efforts to discredit pro-life arguments. For instance, we have failed to validate women's lives by bolstering our arguments with conjectures about how anti-abortion laws and sentiment affect a few women's choices, namely those whose pregnancies are the result of rape or incest or present a threat to the mother's life. While these cases are tragic, they by no means represent the extraordinary number of women struggling to make decisions about their pregnancies in light of their limited financial, psychological, and social resources—all the supposedly frivolous reasons women seek to terminate their pregnancies. We must give voice and recognition to women's agency in concrete terms rather than rambling on about abstract ideas of privacy, choices, and rights. We must expand our rhetorical agenda far beyond abortion and birth control to address holistically the multiple, intersecting conditions of women's

lives. This strategy will provide a much more convincing rhetorical argument to the moderate masses who are tired of the polemical pro-life/pro-choice debate. Mainstream pro-choice feminists must radicalize our minds and mouths and move to reframe the notion and discourse of fetal personhood in terms of women *and* fetuses whose relationship is complexly interdependent and dynamic.

Doing so will require a willingness to face our own ideological demons as well as those emanating from the pro-life establishment. No one wants to sit down with the so-called enemy, but the time has come for mainstream pro-choice feminists to stake our claim on the moral high ground and to express our willingness to engage in civil dialogue in a public forum. NARAL, to its credit, has attempted such a feat with its recent advertisement in The Weekly Standard. The advertisement, in the form of an open letter entitled “A Message to the Right-to-Life Movement from NARAL Pro-Choice America,” implores the magazine’s conservative readership to put aside ideological differences and work with progressives/liberals to reduce the number of abortions by supporting legislation to improve access to birth control. Admittedly, the message falls far short of addressing the social conditions of women’s lives and represents a superficial approach to a remarkably complex issue, but it is nevertheless an attempt to dialogue with oppositional voices. From mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations and their supporters, we need relentless calls for public forums, media coverage, conferences, and educational seminars on national, regional, and local grassroots levels.

On an individual level, specifically for us women who assist in the provision of abortion services, we cannot refuse to speak honestly about how abortions are performed,

what aborted fetal tissue looks like, and the manner in which it is disposed. To do so would be to hide the very truths about abortion that the pro-life establishment then distorts and demonizes in order to stigmatize women who seek them and the individuals who help them. Those of us who work directly with women terminating their pregnancies need to reflect critically on how we judge our actions (i.e., participating in abortions) and the women we serve. We have to be willing to deconstruct our own attitudes about sexuality, fetal life and value, where we *really* stand on the morality of abortion, and where our limits lie. What I am saying is that there are people who are ideologically pro-choice but who cannot morally and/or physically participate in the act of abortion. They are drawn to the activist element of work in abortion clinics but are not prepared for a full commitment to serving women's needs. For instance, the clinic where I work has hired individuals who, upon realizing the extent of what they will see and participate in, then try to place stipulations on what tasks they can and cannot perform (i.e., counseling but not assisting with the abortion) and which women they can and cannot assist (i.e., those undergoing first trimester but not second-trimester abortions). The clinic's management indulges some of this self-absorbed behavior much to the detriment of the staff's morale, the pro-choice feminist movement, and the women being served. I believe the unwillingness to grapple with our own moral contradictions and prejudices influences profoundly the way we (as individuals and a collective pro-choice feminist voice) speak to women both privately and publicly. For instance, if one finds the idea of assisting with a second-trimester abortion inconsistent with one's moral beliefs and refuses to do so, how can one counsel (in good faith) a woman seeking this procedure without imparting

some sense of moral hesitation or judgment? How will she (the counselor) respond to a woman who requests her presence during the second-trimester abortion? How will this woman's sense of agency be affected when she discovers that she is being judged by the very person she's come to for help? Every time we (women working in abortion clinics) allow this scenario to occur, we contribute to the stigmatization of abortion and women's disempowerment.

I wholeheartedly believe that there exist realms in which all pro-choice activists can serve the cause and that it is perfectly legitimate to not be involved with "hands-on" care. Nevertheless, I remain adamant in my message to pro-choice feminist activists who are already working or are considering working directly with women seeking abortions: You cannot show up on the front line of the struggle and politely excuse yourself from the messy carnage of women's lives. It just will not happen. For the sake of all women's agency, it cannot happen. We who work directly with women seeking abortions do not have the luxury nor the moral authority to pick and choose who we serve. Neither do mainstream pro-choice feminists who purport to serve all women.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Only when mainstream pro-choice feminists can examine themselves individually and collectively will they effectively raise awareness about the need to support women's agency and to educate others about choices and rights in a context of social justice for all. Organizations such as PPFA and NARAL need to reevaluate their priorities along with those of their regional and local affiliates to ensure that appropriate outreach initiatives are being implemented in an equitably accessible manner (i.e., not just via internet). Providers of abortion services need to rethink their capitalist agendas when determining fees for abortions and negotiating payments for some women and not others. These providers need to consider the progressive cause that they are purportedly serving as they maintain a hierarchical stronghold on employees' knowledge about and ownership in the organizations. They need to consider operating as non-profit entities and to contemplate how their structure and policies work to profit off the promotion of women's agency within a sexist, racist, eugenicist, and pro-capitalist society. Anything less is immoral and fundamentally unjust. Moreover, abortion providers' failure to address this specific issue leaves the discursive realm open to inflammatory criticism from the pro-life establishment who claims that the abortion industry "profit[s] from women's pain" (Feminists for Life of America). On the issue of profit, I believe they make a valid point.

Mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations, including providers of abortion services, must continuously work toward the goal of reclaiming and reframing the discourse of fetal personhood. We must reframe the discourse to reflect concern for women's lives *and* the potential lives of their fetuses utilizing a maternal/fetal relationality paradigm that encompasses the many voices of competing, divergent interests. This paradigm presupposes an interdependent relationship between women and fetuses that continuously shifts to accommodate changes in the contexts of multiple intertwining lives. Working within this paradigm requires a radical reassessment of our priorities and a commitment to build coalitions that transcend single-issue politics. Such coalitions will help ensure that the language we use to articulate our message accurately reflects a collective praxis for reproductive justice.

Mainstream pro-choice feminists must ask themselves exactly who their strategies are designed to serve. We are serving our mostly white, middle-class, college-educated selves. As Leela Fernandes, author of Transforming Feminist Practice: Non-Violence, Social Justice and the Possibilities of a Spiritualized Feminism, so eloquently reminds us, “[T]he exclusive focus on demands has led feminists to miss another equally important focus, a focus on the process of giving and of giving up” (73). I am not suggesting that we cede ground to the pro-life establishment, concede that the fetus is a person with full moral rights, or give up picking and choosing laws to support and work against. I am suggesting that we recognize that we are sacrificing the greater good for a few fragile egos. We must give up our stilted rhetoric and transform our discourse into something to which people other than our ardent supporters can relate. We need to embrace a

transformative paradigm that will enable us to articulate a radical vision of service to women and to reframe the discourse of fetal personhood in terms of the ideals of equality, compassion, and respect for women and fetuses, rather than immorality, depravity, and murder. We face a critical choice requiring immediate action. I have made my decision and hope that mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations will soon share my vision. What a truly empowering e-mail alert that will be.

¹I use the term “mainstream” to refer to those entities most visible in the sociopolitical debates on reproductive issues in contemporary U.S. society. I further characterize mainstream pro-choice organizations, such as PPFA and NARAL, as feminist because they support women’s moral autonomy and reproductive agency. PPFA and NARAL articulate a liberal feminist agenda, but neither claims the term “feminist” in public discourse.

²I refer to fetal rights advocates as “pro-life” and women’s advocates as “pro-choice.” I realize the limiting potential of such labels and that these labels do not represent uniform belief systems among all members of the umbrella groups. However, these terms are commonly used in contemporary discussions of reproductive issues, abortion in particular, in contemporary U.S. society. I believe to attempt a discussion of the discourse of fetal personhood without using them would be to neglect the obvious and to alienate a significant number of readers not familiar with alternative labels.

³The photograph of a pile of supposedly aborted, late-term fetuses in a trashcan is prevalent in pro-life propaganda. The photograph, entitled “Human Garbage,” is the creation of Dr. John Willke, a man Carol A. Stabile refers to in “The Traffic in Fetuses” as a “Catholic ‘sex educator’ who rose to the rank of director of the National Right to Life Committee” (145). Stabile credits Willke with “put[ting] the fetus on the cultural map” (145) through his ownership of Hayes Publishing Company, an organization that

sells anti-abortion rhetorical and visual propaganda. I have collected several samples of Hayes' propaganda at the abortion clinic in which I work. Pro-life protesters thrust their flyers/brochures at women as they enter the clinic, and most of the women conveniently discard them in "trash cans" where I retrieve them at a later time.

⁴Much of pro-life propaganda refers to the fetus as male and uses masculine pronouns when describing the fetus's characteristics and behavior within the womb. I understand the sexism inherent in speaking of the male and using masculine pronouns when making universal claims. I use masculine pronouns when referencing the fetus in this context in order to illustrate the sexist characteristics of pro-life rhetoric.

⁵On November 12, 2002, Dennis G. Smith, Director of the Center for Medicaid and State Operations, posted a letter to state health officials on the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services website informing them that states would now be able to provide "prenatal care to unborn children under the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP)" per a new ruling at 42 CFR 457.10 that defines a "child" as "an individual from conception up to age 19." There exists a scarcity of federal and state funds for health care coverage for low-income individuals, and it is unlikely that increased governmental funding will occur in the future. Therefore, if states choose to amend their plans to reflect the federal ruling, we can suspect that they will most likely shift funds from some eligible, low-income "born children" to low-income "unborn children."

⁶A review of literature regarding survival of pre-term babies indicates that the accepted threshold of viability is between 22 and 24 weeks gestation. Babies born at less than 22 weeks gestation lack the lung capacity for resuscitation measures to be effective.

The few that manage to survive premature birth between 22 and 24 weeks gestation require intensive neonatal medical and technological support indefinitely. Even then, a significant number will suffer lifelong, profound medical problems and disabilities, such as chronic respiratory disease(s), cerebral palsy, blindness, deafness, and mental retardation. See the following: M. Levene, "Is Intensive Care for Very Immature Babies Justified?" Acta Paediatrica 93 (2004): 149-52; Giovanna Verlato, et al., "Guidelines for Resuscitation in the Delivery Room of Extremely Preterm Infants," Journal of Child Neurology 10.1 (2004): 31-34; Judette M. Louis, et al., "Perinatal Intervention and Neonatal Outcomes Near the Limit of Viability," American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology 191 (2004): 1398-402; and Trond Markestad, et al., "Early Death, Morbidity, and Need of Treatment Among Extremely Premature Infants," Pediatrics 115.5 (2005): 1289-97.

⁷Much of pro-life rhetoric is couched within a "family values" framework that reflects patriarchal norms espoused by the fundamentalist, religious right in which women are viewed as inferior and subservient to men. Within this belief system, men are regarded as the heads of household, and women are revered highly, if not solely, for their roles as mothers and servants to others.

⁸I use the term "American" in reference to the U.S. in this context, but I recognize that it applies equally to other countries in the Western hemisphere.

⁹Norma McCorvey is the Texas woman at the center of the *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion in 1973. She has since converted to Catholicism,

publicly voiced her regret over having an abortion, and joined the pro-life establishment's efforts to outlaw abortion.

¹⁰The thrust of the mainstream pro-choice feminist organizations' public campaign is the battle for the Supreme Court, especially since Justice Sandra Day O'Connor's resignation in July 2005, followed by the death of Chief Justice William Rehnquist, and President Bush's subsequent nomination of conservative judge, John G. Roberts, Jr., for the Chief Justice's position. Pro-choice advocates fear the nomination of a conservative and/or extremist judge who will tip the balance of the court against *Roe* in future rulings.

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